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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 NEW DELHI 000934

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR TIBET COORDINATOR DOBRIANSKY

NSC FOR HADLEY/ABRAMS

H PASS TO SPEAKER PELOSI, REPRESENTATIVES MARKEY,
MCDERMOTT, MILLER, SENSENBRENNER, INSLEE, HOLMES-NORTON,
SOLIS, ESHOO AND HOLT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/31/2018

TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR ETRD EINV MNUC PARM IN CH PK

SUBJECT: FS MENON PESSIMISTIC ON TIBET AND PAKISTAN

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Classified By: Ambassador David Mulford for Reasons 1.4 (B, D)

¶1. (C) Summary: Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon told the Ambassador March 31 that he expected elements of the Tibetan community to become more independent of the Dalai Lama's moderate line the longer they reside in India's "free and open society." He asserted that India would have no problem with any attempts by the U.S. to resettle Tibetan refugees currently in India, and he noted that the government could issue Indian re-entry permits which would allow Tibetan refugees to return to India. The Ambassador asked about Menon's thoughts regarding political developments in Pakistan. Menon said that the UPA government will reach out to the new government after the swearing-in ceremony, but he highlighted two concerns. He worried that President Musharraf would not allow the new government to take credit for the progress that India and Pakistan made in confidence-building measures, and he wondered whether the new leadership even has the capacity to complete those steps. He

also observed that jihadis have increased their activities, and he worried about the temptation for the new government to incite external conflicts to increase its popularity. End Summary.

Menon Sees Tibetan Protests As a Long-Term Problem

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¶ 12. (C) In a March 31 meeting with Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon, the Ambassador related that he met with the Dalai Lama March 28, during which the Dalai Lama articulated his grievances with the Chinese government. The Ambassador asked Menon about the 40 Tibetan prisoners that remain in Delhi jails. Menon assured him that the Indian government would free all the old prisoners, of which seven remained, and would soon release the newly arrested protesters as well. Referring to the barbed wire and barricades placed around the Chinese Embassy last week, Menon observed that "the Chinese are now locked in jail themselves."

¶ 13. (C) Menon stated that the sentiment of Indians "lies clearly on the side of Tibet." "As a democracy, we allow Tibetans to express themselves, so long as they do not break the law," he assured the Ambassador. Menon reiterated that India's stated policy is to "provide a space for which the Tibetan culture and religion is safe." But Menon foresaw a long-term problem in which segments of the Tibetan community, while continuing to respect the Dalai Lama, diverge in their thinking. "They have lived in the free and open society of India," Menon observed, "and they believe that they have rights." He wondered about the effect of continued protests, since Han Chinese already outnumbered ethnic Tibetans in Lhasa, and would soon dominate the region. "There is no existential threat to Chinese control over Tibet today," he

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stated, "and I'm not sure China is in any mood to give up." He conceded that he was not sure what the Indian government could do "beyond asking Tibet and China to talk to each other."

Menon Has No Problem With Resettling Refugees in U.S.

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¶ 14. (C) The Ambassador recounted that the Dalai Lama had pleaded with the congressional delegation led by Speaker Nancy Pelosi to resettle 2,000 Tibetan refugees currently residing in India in the U.S. Menon responded, "we have always said that they're free to leave if they want." He related that Tibetans who leave India have sought "No Objection to Return to India (NORI) certificates" from the Indian government, which allows them to return to India "like a re-entry visa." Menon asserted that the Indian government stands ready to issue such certificates for those refugees who have lived in India for some time, but might have trouble issuing such paperwork for recent arrivals. Menon also stated that the Indian government would have no problem with Tibetan refugees transiting through India from Nepal to the U.S., although he noted that they would not receive the NORI certificates. "We would be happy to help in any way we can," he assured the Ambassador.

Menon Worried About New Pakistan Government

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¶ 15. (C) The Ambassador asked for Menon's thoughts on the new government in Pakistan. Menon contended that "the new system was trying to figure itself out," but he offered that the Indian government would reach out after today's swearing-in ceremony. After hearing Nawaz Sharif declare that the new government would review all actions taken by its predecessor, he worried that Prime Minister Gillani's government would lack the capacity to continue President Musharraf's efforts to build confidence-building measures. Moreover, he cautioned that President Musharraf himself might not "allow someone else to take credit for all our hard work with him."

¶6. (C) Menon also expressed anxiety about the rise of jihadis in the past two months which, he thought, stemmed from a process begun by the earthquake relief camps set up by terrorist groups in December 2005. Those camps established linkages between Al Qaeda and the Taliban, which then fed into Punjab groups, particular Jaish-e-Muhammad, he explained. Menon related that a former Chief Secretary told him that the March 3 Lahore bombing may have involved a Kashmiri group. The ramped up terrorist activity has raised suspicion in India, he continued. "The first temptation for a new government is to make peace inside, and go to war outside," he cautioned, adding that Nawaz Sharif had followed

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such a path. The new government's approach to the Kashmir issue has also aggravated anxiety in India, he noted. Still, the Indian government planned to keep its head "low and slow while the government finds its level."

Comment: Troubled Neighbors Cause India Grief

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¶7. (C) India has never lived in a quiet neighborhood, and the external difficulties in Tibet, China and Pakistan have compounded India's internal problems. While India continues to attempt to enhance its economic relationship with China, it must also manage Tibetans and Indians who strongly support the Dalai Lama and an autonomous Tibet. As Menon warns, the internal pressure to support Tibet will only increase. As for Pakistan, the Indian government remains determined to avoid becoming a political issue, despite the recent spike in terrorist incidents that, Menon claimed, have roots in a troubled political environment. A greater increase in attacks, however, will severely test an Indian government that will face a tough test from the political opposition as general elections approach.

MULFORD